

Long-Distance Rivalry

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Growing up is hard; it's even harder if a friend tries to drag you back into childhood. Now stuck with a job at the Route 34 Daycare and a very quiet life, Danny's new routine is squashed as his old friend Julie tries to get him back into pursuing their dream, to be the very best trainers the world had ever seen. Too bad that these dreams are just flights of fancy. Or are they?

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Dear Danny,

It's sure been a while since you moved out of Fallarbor Town. Life here in our sleepy little birthplace has been rather boring without you around. How's life in Goldenrod City? Totally more hectic and fun than this town of fossils (of both kinds), I bet.

Now, you are probably wonder why I sent you this message. 'Who cares for e-mails anymore', right? You're probably right, I could've simply called you up or something else. I actually thought about calling you, but it didn't feel right, you know? No topic seemed big enough to need it, and the last thing I wanted was to annoy you, you know how much I can ramble on and on and oooooon, but whatever.

The truth is... I miss you, quite a lot. I miss when we went to Meteor Falls to see the stars at night, when we ran through the volcanic ash raining on Route 113, when we kept bragging about becoming the best trainers Hoenn had ever seen, when we were being idiots and trying to befriend every Lotad and Zangoose out there, with my parents and yours yelling at us for getting into dangers. It was a load of fun, and it's just not the same without you.

But I didn't call you just to think about the old times, you know. There's this thing that happened, and it's my duty to tell you of pretty much the only few interesting things that happen in this town in the middle of nowhere.

See, I was taking a stroll through Route 114 while Lanette was doing a check of our family computer, and you will never guess what I saw. A Seviper and a Zangoose. Now, okay, seeing those two Pokémon together isn't so weird on itself, but it's what happened that was weird. See, the Zangoose was actually trying to talk with and befriend the Seviper and acting all cozy and friendly. The Seviper

was really freaked out, and then left. Now, you'd think the story ends here, but nope! There's a sequel!

See, the Zangoose was very sad of how things went, and was pretty much crying. I pitied him and went to give him a pat on the back, telling him there are many other people and Pokémon he can befriend and to not give up. Standard pep talk stuff, you know. The Zangoose just stood there and stared at me, but before I could get what he was thinking Lanette called me back, so I went to grab the computer and bid the Pokémon farewell.

And then, when I arrived back home, I realized the Zangoose followed me! I was a bit scared and almost dropped the computer, but the Zangoose simply stood there, a bit shy and waiting. In the end he tried to approach, and I got it: he wanted to be with me! Sure, it was a bit sudden and I didn't know what to say, but then my parents came out and I had to explain why the heck a nervous Zangoose was at our doorstep. Fun times, for sure.

Things is, the Zangoose really seemed to want some friends, he seemed nice, and we had no Pokémon at home, so in the end we decided to catch him properly. And so, now I'm the pride owner of a Zangoose! His name is Zan now and he's every bit of a cinnamon roll, but I'm working on slowly making him into a badass now. It's... not gone the best yet, but there's time for it.

But yeah, I've got my very own Pokémon now, and I love it! I took the chance to convince my parents to get me a Pokémon Trainer License, and they finally caved in! It will take a little while for all the paperwork, but I'm on route to finally become a trainer! I'm so excited, and I really had to tell you!

But yeah, that's what I wanted to tell you. It just sort of happened, but I made a first step towards my dream, and I wanted to know how you were doing. I really hope I didn't send you a message at a bad time, and look forward to your answer. Be sure to reply soon, though!

Have a great time,

Julie

Hey, Julie. Guess I should apologize for not calling, but we've been busy. Though, you don't have to be that much of a worrywart, you can hit me up any time. It's not like I've got the most active social life ever, anyway.

Though, you're really overhyping Goldenrod. Sure, there are a lot more people around, but it's just as boring as Fallarbor Town, really. No one ever has any time to rest, it's just work, work, and more work, and I sure hope you like instant ramen, because that's the only thing my parents get to prepare these days.

As for me... well, school isn't the most interesting thing and every kid already has their circle of friends, so I'm pretty much the odd one out. And let's not talk of how the Game Corner was replaced by a snobbish club that only plays Voltorb Flip now. All in all, things are kind of a bummer, really.

Not all is bad, though: the countryside near Goldenrod is fun, the radio gets great reception, and I got to find a small job as an assistant at the Route 34 Pokémon Daycare. Taking care of other trainers' Pokémon is far more fun than I expected, and a great way to learn about them. I can show you a few pictures next time, if you want.

Though, it's great that you found a new Pokémon! A Zangoose, huh? I always thought you were more of a Zubat person, but I guess one can't choose in this kind of situation. I do hope you all the best, you definitely have the drive to become the next Champion of the Hoenn region if you want to.

I don't have much time to talk since I'm at work right now, but as I said, if you want to call, just do so. It's always nice to hear back from you.

Be well,

Danny

As he finally completed his message, Danny spent a few short minutes checking it out on his phone: he didn't like to type there much, but knowing Julie she would've gotten rather impatient if he didn't reply straight away. The boy sighed and passed a hand over his spiky brown hair, and then pressed the 'send' option to get it done with.

He wasn't really happy with how short his message ended up being and how much he preferred to leave out of it, but he did owe her a reply, if nothing else.

He adjusted his work uniform and his bandanna as he turned back to the many scattered Pokémon resting in the Pokémon Daycare, some running through the grass and others resting under the trees or the nearby pond, all enjoying the quiet day the weather was providing them. He prepared himself to check their needs, until his telephone started to ring immediately after.

Danny froze, eyes shifting back to his phone's screen and the name of the caller as it rang. He considered letting the telephone go, but he quickly sighed and hit the call button.

"Hello?" a quiet, yet excited voice asked. One that Danny knew very well.

"Julie?" Danny grumbled and rolled his eyes. "Man, were you stalking your mailbox or something? I sent that e-mail two seconds ago..."

"Hey, I've been waiting forever for that answer!"

Danny could almost picture Julie puffing her cheeks and glaring at the phone on the other end. He refrained from chuckling, and instead groaned. "You sent that mail just yesterday, you know."

"Still felt like forever!"

"Good thing you didn't want to annoy me..."

"Gee, sorry if I really wanted to talk with my best friend."

Danny sighed at that. 'Best friends' was probably an apt description of what they were once, not that Julie realized it yet. Still, he shook his head and took a deep breath, letting his mind go back on topic.

"Well, it's good to hear you, in any case." He idly turned towards a Wooper enjoying the lake water as he adjusted the phone on his shoulder. "So, how's Zan?"

"He's doing fine, he's trying to help my mother cook now."

"Cook? How, exactly?"

"He's cutting the vegetables. Perfect honing for natural weapons!" Julie let out a pleased and rather scary giggle at that, enough to make Danny's skin crawl.

"You seem unhealthily excited about this..."

"Unlike a certain someone, I didn't decide to become a farm boy and leave my dreams to wait forever."

Danny quirked an eyebrow, grabbing the phone tightly. "First, it's not a farm, it's a Daycare. And second, what's that about dreams?"

"You heard me. We wanted to be the best trainers of all time, right? Then why are you wasting time at a Daycare?"

The boy fell silent, his eyes going back to the Pokémon he was caring for, he then frowned, clenching his grip on the phone.

"I'm not wasting time," he said, voice lower and shakier than before. "It's just a way to be prepared when the time comes."

He could bet Julie rolled her eyes at that, if he knew her well enough. "Come on, what's the point in preparing yourself? The cool part of

being a trainer is the adventure! The thrills! The unexpected! Do you really want a boring, safe journey in your future?"

"Yes, because it'd be *safe* . You should know it better than anyone else."

Julie didn't reply immediately, maybe hurt, maybe shocked, Danny didn't know and in all honesty didn't care.

And then, she sighed. "Great, my rival has become a wimp. Just wonderful."

"I'm not a wimp, I'm smart." He didn't even bother to sound humble at that point. She didn't deserve that.

Julie only grew more restless in response. "Then prove you're not a wimp! Drop everything and start a journey! It's not hard, don't you think?"

"I'd still need to wait a few months for a license, you know. Just like you."

"Details, details." Julie exhaled, and then seemed to calm down just a bit. "But like, don't you want to rush into adventure? Come on, be honest."

Danny bared his teeth instinctively. Didn't she know when to quit that argument? Why the heck did she have to be such a thrill seeker? Did she have *any* idea how the world worked at all? He had many other questions swirling in his head, but he rubbed his forehead and tried to forget of them all, simply sighing and focusing back on Julie.

"Whether I do or not, I prefer to know what I'm getting into."

"You sure are stubborn." She chuckled, more playful than angry now. "Well, then I'll be stubborn myself! I'll make sure you will get up your butt and get some excitement now!"

Danny narrowed his eyes. "What if I just don't want to?"

"I can't believe you'd really not want some thrills. The Danny I know is the greatest daredevil of Fallarbor Town! Jumping straight into danger is what you do best!"

And here she was again. Danny knew it already, but how stubborn Julie could be still managed to impress him.

The boy sighed and shook his head. "I've got some work to do right now, Julie. Let's talk about this later, alright?"

"Hey, don't you close the phone on me-"

Danny closed the phone on her and let out a rather pleased sigh at the newfound silence. If he was wondering why he hadn't contacted Julie in quite a while, now he had no reason to. Sure, he was happy to know she was doing well for herself, but at times he just wanted her to shut up and leave, something she never got the hint about.

Danny's eyes went back to the grass as he pocketed his cellphone. He didn't like to be such a jerk, but he had thought enough about his future in the last few months, and he didn't need a relic from the past to yell at him what to do. Because that was what Julie and Fallarbor Town were: a relic, something to forget as he tried to start over and work for his future. He had to be realistic and hard working, and chasing a way too abstract dream would've gotten him nowhere.

All the times he tried to explore Meteor Falls in search of the fabled home of the Draconids, all the times he and Julie heard Lanette talk of the Pokémon collection of her friend Bill, all the fantasizing of his team were great, unforgettable memories, sure. But they wouldn't have helped him with real life, no matter how hard he hoped they could.

Danny exhaled once more. Julie really had a knack to make him overthink, one way or another.

"Is something wrong, Danny?"

Danny stood back to attention, straightening his uniform and turning back to the main building of the Daycare, where his elderly employer was now staring at him in concern.

The boy quickly forced a grin, rubbing his neck. "Nah, it's nothing."

The old woman continued to observe him, with Danny feeling stuck in place. He knew that the Daycare woman could be very perceptive, and he was sure hoping her elderly sensors or whatever she used weren't picking up on anything weird that would require lengthy pep talks or something like that.

Thankfully for him, the old woman simply nodded and smiled at him. "If you say so. Can you at least round up the Pokémon for now? It's almost lunch time."

"Right on it!" Danny pulled off a grin and struck a military salute, before he turned back to the relaxing Pokémon to start gathering them. As he did, he chanced a look upward, enjoying the rays of sun and the scattered white clouds overhead.

Who cared if Julie decided to be a bother now? He had peace, quiet and a lot of things to learn now. There was no way she could ruin all of that now.

Right?

And here is it, the first chapter in a little project I've been thinking about recently, and I decided to dive into for a variety of reasons, the most important of which being that I've been hit by a mild form of writer's block recently, and to try to get out of it, I wanted to try writing something simpler and more laidback than usual, outside my usual boundaries.

While I have a general idea of what to do, I can't say for sure how many chapters this story will be. I'll try to experiment with telling this story in various ways depending on what's more

appropriate, and also to try flexing my creative muscles a bit. That said, I plan for every chapter to mostly stay on the short side, and to maintain a leisurely pace with a slice of life-y tone. In general, my main objective here is to tell a Pokémon story while avoiding most of the usual trappings of a Pokémon trainer fic, and hope the experiment will result in an enjoyable read.

I thank everyone who will give this story a try to begin with, and hope you'll stick through this little experiment and my next projects. Many thanks for your time and support, and see you all next time!